

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
SUZUKI-ROSHI LECTURE
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We say "Zen Center student," you know. Or, we say "Zen Center." But it is—tonight—today—I want to make this kind of idea clear, you know, as much as possible. Although, you know, I say, "You are Zen Center students," and although you say, "You are Zen Center students," you say, "I am Zen Center student." I don't know! [Laughs.] I am not so sure who you are. But to me, as long as you are here, you know, to me you are Zen Center students. [Laughs.] That's all. And if you go out from this building, I don't know who you are. [Laughs.]

Do you know who you are? [Laughs.] Is there any particular, you know—do you belong to some particular, you know, religion? Are you member of some particular church, or member, you know—do you strictly belong to some group? I don't know. Perhaps not. Most of you does not belong to any group in its strict sense. But some of them [you] may belong to—strictly belong to Zen Center. And if someone belong [laughs] to Zen Center in its strict sense, and some of you do not belong to any school and yet practicing our way in the same building, you know, how that is possible [laughs], you know? How is it possible to practice, you know, same—some certain way, you know, with someone who strictly belong to some group. How is it possible? If that is not possible, you know, should I accept student who belong to Zen Center in its strict sense? Should I do that?

Maybe some student thinks in that way, but, you know, I accept, you know, students from various religion. Some of you may be Christian. Some of you may be Rinzai students. Some of you may be, you know—may, you know, still, you know, have some other teacher in your mind—always, maybe. But still I accept them. Why is it possible for me to accept students, you know, from various religion as a Zen Center student without any discrimination? It's, you know—we, you know—I or we (same thing [laughs])—if I say "we" [laughs] you will be very much concerned about word "we." If I say "I," it may be okay, you know, but if I say "we," [laughs] it looks like, you know, there is some, you know, group, and so-called-it "Sōtō" or "Rinzai" group or, you know, Sōtō group. So if we say "we," you know, you may not feel so good, but to me it is same thing, you know. "We." "I." Same.

But anyway, at Zen Center, anyway, you know, I can accept students from various religion without any discrimination. That is why I must

explain—I feel I have to explain why we sew *rakusus*, you know, why we keep our precepts, you know, Buddhist precepts [laughs]. If I say "Buddhist precept," again you will not—some of you will not feel so good: "Buddhist precepts." you know. You think, you know, Buddhists have some particular precepts, but our precepts is not like that. So it is necessary for me to explain what is Buddhist precepts, why you sew *rakusu*, you know, why you wear *rakusu*.

I cannot, you know, or I have no intention to explain precepts in its traditional, you know, way, but I want to explain it as much as possible in some way who—in some way which you can understand, and which I, in some way, which I feel, you know, saying truthfully how I feel about precepts.

First of all, precepts, we say, or explanation of precepts—for an instance, Dōgen-zenji or some other teachers—Bodhidharma—it's the precepts is, you know, something which everyone has, you know, as its—as his own nature. That is precepts. It is not, you know—precepts is not something which was decided by Buddha. Precepts is originally—precepts is something which makes Buddha Buddha, you know. Because of precepts he became Buddha. So precepts is first, and Buddha appeared, you know, next.

Before Buddha appear there were precepts. And so in this sense, before, you know, Bodhidharma appeared—came to China—there were precepts. So before everyone, you know, come to this world there is precepts. Everyone has the precepts in its true sense. When you come out, you know, you may be already, you know, male or female [laughs], so accordingly, you know, as soon as you take some form, there is some reason why you became—appear—in this world as a man or as a woman. And naturally women has their own way, and men has their own way. So, naturally various way of life will appear, and between boys [?], you know, according to his character, inborn character, or his physical, you know, condition, there must be various way of life. That is actually our precepts.

So, woman—a woman—who has more complicated physical, you know, body, has more precepts, and that is quite natural [laughs], you know. You—a woman has more complicated—emotionally and physically, they are more complicated [laughs, laughter], so naturally a woman must have more precepts than [laughs] a man has. That is quite [laughs]—if you say, you know, that is not fair [laughs, laughter], it doesn't make sense, you know. It shouldn't be like that. If a woman has same precepts as a man has, that is not fair [laughs, laughter]. That is how precepts, you know, become written-down precepts.

And, you know, if so, you know, why should we say, you know, Buddhist precepts or Christian commandment or precepts, you know? According to the way of life, there are various interpretation of our true nature, our way of life, but originally it is, you know, just, you know, human nature.

According to the human nature, we have various precepts, and according to the condition we live, we have various precepts, that's all. When we, you know, transmit the precepts, we put emphasis on this point, you know, not each of 250 precepts, you know, but the, you know, original, you know, universal point which is, you know, universal to everyone, which is available to everyone, which, in some way, which everyone can accept it. We transmit our precepts. So instead of emphasizing—put emphasis on various, you know, precepts, one by one, we put more emphasis on our original human nature or buddha nature.

To realize what is our human nature beyond various way of life is, you know, our way of transmitting precepts. So explanation of each precept is how, you know, each precept appeared, or why we must have, for an instance, sixteen precepts, and how we can accept, you know, the precepts as their original, you know, nature is how you study precepts. And if so, intellectual, you know, study does not make sense. If you stick to—if you want to study, you know, precepts just by your head, you know, sixteen precepts, you can, you know, compare one precept to the other. And you—

But it is difficult to accept as just one precept, you know, which is the source of all precepts. It is not possible to understand, to accept precepts in that way by your mind only, so physical practice should follow. And if you, you know, come to the point where you should observe precepts one by one, then you will see what is the true meaning of the precepts. Before you, you know, face to the problem, precept is there, you know, and you are studying precepts.

But if you face to each problem you have, then, you know, just study of precepts doesn't work, and you should, you know, make some decision which way you take, you know. Usually there is good, you know, promising way, and, you know, maybe there is dark way and there is, you know, promising way. You can see some light ahead on you, you know, so you should make some choice. Then there is actual precepts, you know. So that kind of precepts could be found out when you face to real problem. That is actually how you observe precepts, how precepts make sense, you know, how precepts help you.

It is big mistake, you know—precepts show you, you know, always, you know, some certain way for you before you try to go, you know.

When you try to make trip, you know, the sign will make sense, you know. If you—when you do not drive [laughs], sign does not make any sense. If you study sign, you know [laughs], from San Francisco to Los Angeles, you know, there could be various sign from San Francisco to Los Angeles, but [laughs] to study the sign doesn't make any sense. But if you drive a car from [laughs] San Francisco to Los Angeles, you know, what you do is just to follow the sign, and sign make sense.

So life is first, you know, your actual life is—way of life is first. And to accept various things which may happen to you in your future as it is and try to make some trip, you know, is the most important thing for you. So in this sense, you know, whether you are Buddhist or Christian, you know, for us it doesn't matter. Each one has each one's own problem, and that, you know, that problem, there is no diffi- [partial word]—no problem—Christian problem [laughs] or Buddhist problem. Because if, you know, you uselessly compare Christian precepts to Buddhist precepts, you know, you create problem. But if you are concentrated [on] actual life, moment after moment, and if you are sincere and honest on your life, you know, then there is no difference between Christian precepts or Buddhist precepts.

There is no name. Sign is just a sign—which way to go, you know. If you understand in that way, if you—if your way of life is concentrated on that point, there is no need to, you know, think about if this is Christian science or Buddhist—Christian precepts or Buddhist precepts. It doesn't matter. And what Christian people think is right is right for Buddhists too. If there is two ways, you know, something is wrong [laughs] with precepts. There is only one way for you to go.

But there is a problem again, you know, problem of right or left, good or bad. Mostly for us, you know, the problem is the problem of good or bad. But this is quite simple too, you know. And no one find it so difficult which is good and which is bad [laughs]. Because you want to —because of your ego—egoistic, you know [laughs], desire, you know, you want to make some excuse when you take wrong course. At that time you may say, "Buddha said" [laughs] or "Christ said" to make some excuse for you for going some wrong course. "Buddha put more emphasis on," you know, "more emphasis on sight-seeing trip, so maybe better to go through Santa Cruz instead of [laughs, laughter] [Highway] 101, because Buddha put emphasis," you know, "on it. So it may take more time. Although I have to arrive to Tassajara ten o'clock, but we have to," you know, "go around Santa Cruz. Maybe we will arrive at eleven o'clock. But Buddha said so [laughs, laughter]. I will go through Santa Cruz to Tassajara." That is actually, you know—when you say "Buddhism" or "Christianity," mostly, you know, you are

making some excuse. But way is very simple, and there is—best way is to see sign, just to see sign. There is no problem actually.

Another point is when you observe precepts in your everyday life, if you—if you really, you know, want to know what is precepts, you should be concentrated on what you do. You shouldn't even think about precepts, you know. Then naturally you will, you know, find out your own way. That is something, you know, practice, you know, closely related to Zen practice. If you know—if you make trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles every day like driver, then, you know, you don't have to think so much the way you go to—about the way you go to Los Angeles. The only thing is to go to Los Angeles without having accident [laughs]. That is more important thing, you know, for a man, you know, who is driving car always. That is the point, you know: not precepts, but to be concentrated in each time, in each moment, in his driving. That is the most important point.

When Oka Sōtan-rōshi¹ was young boy [laughs], his teacher, Tōken-rōshi,² told him to buy bean curd, you know. So he went to the store. On the way, he saw, you know, picture for advertising acrobatic [laughs] theater, and he was standing, seeing the various picture in front of the building. And while he was watching it [laughs], he heard, you know, bell of his own temple. It was sign of meal time [laughs]. He was supposed to come back to the temple with bean curd and cook [laughs]—finish cooking before meal time, but he was watching the picture so long time without knowing what time it was. Hearing the bell, he noticed, you know, his duty—what was his duty. So he, you know, dashed in the store. "Give me tofu!" [Laughs.] As soon as old [laughs] man gave it all to him, he dashed back. But on the way what he noticed was he left his hat [laughs] in the store. So he ran back again to the store. "Give me! Give me! Give me!" And the old man said—old woman said, "What?" "Give me!" He didn't s[ay], you know—he meant his hat, but, you know, he was so—his mind was so busy [laughs, laughter] and the word "hat" didn't come out. "Give me!"

¹ Oka Sōtan-rōshi (1860-1922): a professor at and ultimately president of Komazawa University in Tōkyō, where Suzuki-rōshi graduated. He was the first in a series of lecturers on the *Shōbōgenzō* at Komazawa [Carl Bielefeldt, *Sati Conference*, MS p. 3]. His early master was Tōken Mitetsu, from whom he received dharma transmission. His later teacher was Nishiari Bokusan, the most prominent Meiji scholar of the *Shōbōgenzō*. He was teacher or master of Ian Kishizawa, Eko Hashimoto, Gyokujun So-on, Sawaki Kōdō, and Harada Sōgaku. He served as abbot of Daiji-ji and was named as the first abbot of Antai-ji temple in Gentaku, northern Kyoto, Japan. (One of Oka Sōtan's disciples, Zuirin Odagaki, was the second abbot of Antai-ji and is informally considered its founder. It is traditional to name one's teacher as the titular founder.) Shōhaku Okumura stated that Sawaki Kōdō and Eko Hashimoto studied with Oka Sōtan at Shuzen-ji.

² **Tōken Mitetsu-rōshi**:

Give me! Give me!" "What? What? What?" [Laughs, laughter.] And at last he could say "my hat." "Oh, your hat is on your head! What is matter with you?" [Laughs, laughter.] Again he dashed back to his temple with his hat. That was the story, you know [laughs].

The precept is something like his hat. Precept is always on his head [laughs]. Because he tried to find out, you know, because he wanted to say "hat" or "precepts," you know, it doesn't work, you know. If he has always, you know, his hat, then nothing to, you know, think about it. That is actually how we should keep our precepts. So we rather put, you know, an emphasis on actual practice or zazen, how to be concentrated on what we do, moment after moment.

In sesshin time I talked about *shikantaza*. I feel, you know, I met you, you know—I haven't met you for so long time. We—several—most of you were sitting for five days, and some of you, you know, just—I am seeing some of you for the first time, I feel, you know. But actually, we were discussing about—I was make my—our practice clear, you know, what is *shikantaza*.

In short, *shikantaza* is to live in each moment. That is *shikantaza*—how to live in each moment. So it is, you know, you can apply *shikantaza* in your everyday life. And point is to be concentrated what you do in its true sense, without seeking for anything, you know, inside or outside. To do something—if you do something, you are with everything. When you ignore your actual activity, you know, thinking about something else, that is not real practice.

So real teaching is not, you know, outside of you; it is not inside of you. It is—when you do something, there there is real teaching, and there there is real practice. If you miss, you know, real practice in your everyday life, you will be regret[ful] later, you know. If you are doing your best, that is only way to, you know, to be yourself and to be with everyone. When you are with everyone, you are keeping our precepts, you know, without knowing, you know, whether you have your cap on your head, you know. Even though you don't notice it [laughs], your cap is here. If you become you yourself, and if you—if your practice include everything, moment after moment, you know, precepts—more explicit precepts is always with you.

That is, you know, another point maybe which is more important than verbal transmission of [or?] verbal precepts. If I tried to explain those precepts, it takes time. But how you keep it, in short, is to live in each moment, to be sincere with yourself always, without looking around. If you come here, you know, you must be you, that's all [laughs]. If so, you know, why is it necessary to say you are a Christian or you are, you know, Hindu? Why is that necessary?

It looks like, you know, we are—we are—I am trying to put you in some form, like zazen practice, but it is not so. Actually it is not so. Why we—I put emphasis on form of practice is that is the only way, you know, to have real concentration. If you miss, you know, one instruction which we may give you, there is no real concentration. If your back is like this, you know, you don't have—it is impossible to have deep, good, smooth breathing [laughs]. When you are like this, you know, when you feel as if, you know—to have—excuse me—to have good breathing is explained in—by Dōgen various way, you know, using various characters. But, you know, good breathing means smooth, you know, breathing—smooth, smooth, deep breathing. And it should be calm, and it should be strong, without, you know, having any broking [breaking?]. You know, if you take breathing in this way, if you stop [laughs] at somewhere, it doesn't go through. When you have good posture, breathing, you know, could be very smooth and deep. And it should go—it should reach to your tummy, you know. You should feel in that way. But for a lady, maybe it is something different from my feeling. It looks like, because you have extra organ here, I think, you know. So ladies' breathing does not reach to the bottom of your tummy. You don't feel it in that way, maybe. But should be pretty deep, and feeling must be as if it comes to the bottom of your tummy. Actually breathing does not reach to your bottom of the tummy [laughs]. You know, it may come to the bottom of your lung, but it doesn't reach here. So same thing will be true with ladies' breathing, I think. The feeling should be like that [tape turned over], [you know. Deep breathing]³ ... feeling, you cannot be concentrated on what you do, if you want to do it properly.

When an artist, you know, of, you know, calligraphy or Japanese *sumi* ink, you know, artist work, you know, even though he is not in perfect posture of zazen, you know, they apply that posture in their work. So for them, one stroke or one line, you know, expresses many things, as our practice include everything, you know.

So that is why, you know, that may be the difference between usual, you know, art and Zen art. It—you know [laughs]—it is—full concentration is on one dot, on one line. And the way if you see the way they do it, you will understand it. Mostly, you know, they have the brush on his right hand, but, you know, which is working more hard—harder than his right hand, his left hand [laughs]. So you may say he is, you know, working by left hand with a brush on his right hand.

³ The source of the words within brackets was a notation on the back of the original tape case.

In the same way, whole way, same—all his whole body is working on one line. Maybe it is true with your art. Should be true, you know. If you're, you know, painting just by hand [laughs], by right hand, you know, like this [gestures], you cannot work properly. Some way, you know, your left hand should help right hand, and whole body should make your brush or your hand work freely to express something. So if you actually—if you become one with everything, if your brush, you know, include or express all of your effort, and if he is completely one with everything, you know, he can work in its true sense.

So that is why we put emphasis on, you know, on our posture. Some—you may say someone cannot, you know, sit. If he cannot sit as much as possible, you know, he should keep his back straight, and he should find out how to be concentrated on his, you know, activity. There must be some way to be concentrated on what you do. So while you are sitting, without dreaming of anything, you know, if you can express yourself fully in your zazen, there there is actual practice which include everything. If you have that practice, Buddha is with you, Bodhidharma is with you, and every sages should be with you, actually with you. At that time, who is Christ, who is Buddha, who is Bodhidharma, who is Dōgen, you know? Who they are? It is you yourself.

You know, how is it possible for Buddha to exist forever? The only way is to exist with us. That is only way how he can exist. How is it possible to various sages to exist in our human history? Actual, you know, history is with you, and there is no need to think about it, because you have it. You are with them always. When you think about him, he is, you know, with you with some form. When you do not think about it, still he is with you. And that point should not be forgotten. You think if you—when you—only when you have his image with you he is there. That is, you know, not real, you know, being. Real being is always with you, when you do not even think about him. That is very—actual truth, you know. I forgot, you know, who said so, but when you think about him, he is always with you [laughs]. That is very simple, you know, words and very beautiful words. There were some more, you know, words like that, you know: "When you think about him, he is with you, but if you do not think about him, where is he?" [Laughs.] Where is he? You don't—you think he is not there anymore. That is very shallow, materialistic, you know, understanding. You are not sincere enough. You put him—put them in some book and put them in bookcase, that's all. That is why he suffers [laughs] in bookcase. If you do not put them in bookcase, he is always with you. Can you deny this fact? No one can deny this fact.

If you understand, you know, various sage in that way, you know, can you be just Buddhist? Or can you be just, you know, Christian? You

cannot. You say, "I am Christian," but actually you are not only Christian but also Buddhist. That is very true. When you become you yourself, when you do not put them in bookcase, you know, how is it possible to say, "I am Christian" or "I am Buddhist"? Maybe next question will be, "Then why you wear Buddhist robe, and why you sew Buddhist, you know, robes?" That will be next question, but I don't have time to [laughs, laughter] talk about it right now.

But more important thing this spirit, you know, this practice, this sincerity, you know. Even though, you know, you may laughed at what Oka-rōshi did when he was just a boy, but he was good priest [laughs], even though he was so small. He was very good. He must be scolded by master when he came back to [laughs] his temple, you know. They had to wait maybe another thirty minutes [laughs] before they ate, so he must be scolded. Even though he is scolded, he was a good boy, you know. There is no wonder about that point [laughs]. You cannot say he was—he didn't—he was not observing precepts. He faithfully observed, you know, precepts, and he put his hat always on his head. But sometimes [laughs] he forgot about his hat, that's all.

Did you understand? And I think I am so happy to see you, you know, from various religions. It is okay with me, and you don't have to feel this is Zen Center—special building for Sōtō priests [laughs]. You don't have to feel in that way. Here we are doing our best, you know, to live with people in its true sense. That's all.

Thank you very much.

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